

Seventh Century

ARCHILOCHUS

Epodes*

1. *To Lycambes*

172 Papa Lycambes, what d'you mean by this?
Who has unhinged your wits
that used to be so sound? Now you turn out
the big laugh of the town.

173 You've turned your back on the great bond
of shared salt and table . . .

174 There is a tale men tell
of how a vixen with an eagle once
made friends . . .

(But one day the eagle flew down and carried off one of the vixen's cubs,)

175 taking it to his sons,
and the two fledgelings fell upon a feast
unlovely, on the high
crag where they had their nest.

176 'You see where that high crag is, rugged, harsh?
That's where he sits, and holds
your challenge in contempt.'

177 *(The vixen prays:)*

'O father Zeus, thine is the power in heaven,
and thou dost oversee
men's deeds, wicked and lawful; all creatures'
rights
and wrongs are thy concern.'

(The prayer did not go unanswered. Some time later the eagle seized a piece of meat from a sacrificial altar,)

179 brought it and set it down before his sons,
a feast doom-laden . . .

180 There was a spark of fire in it . . .

(And the nest went up in flames, fledglings and all.)

181 . . . aware of the disaster
. . . helpless . . .
. . . took his way swiftly through the air
wheeling on speedy wings.
. . . Now, do you expect . . . ?

2. *To a Member of the College of Herald's*

185 I want to tell you folk a tale, your Honour,
—oh, it's a mournful dispatch!
A monkey left the other animals
and wandered alone in the wild,
and there a crafty fox came up to him,
bearing a heart full of guile.

(The fox said it had found a treasure which the monkey ought to have, in view of his distinguished status, and led him to a trap that a man had baited with meat.)

225 'Pray go ahead: you are of noble birth!'

186 pressing the bar of the trap.

(The monkey was caught in an undignified posture, releasing the meat for the fox. He remonstrated with the fox, who answered:)

187 'But oh sir Monkey—with a bum like that,
thinking so much of yourself?'

3. *To an Ex-mistress*

188 Your tender skin has lost its former bloom,
dries out in furrows; ugly age
makes you its prey. Sweet charm from your fair
face
has hopped it. After all, the winds
of many winters have assaulted you,
and many a time . . .

189 and many a sightless eel have you taken in

190 and I used to explore your rugged glens
in my full-blooded youth . . .

191 Such was the lust for sex that, worming in
under my heart, quite blinded me
and robbed me of my young wits . . .

4. *Encounter in a Meadow*

196 . . . No, my dear friend,
I'm overcome by crippling desire.

196a ' . . . holding entirely off . . .

If you can't wait and your desire is urgent,
there's somebody else at our house
now longing for a man,

a lovely slender girl, there's nothing wrong
(if I'm any judge) with her looks.

Why not make friends with her?

That's what she said, and here's how I replied:

'Daughter of Amphimedo,
that lady fine and true

whom now the mouldy earth has taken in,
the love-goddess offers young men
a range of joys besides

the sacrament, and one of them will serve.

We'll talk of all this, you and I,
at leisure, when . . .

. . . grows dark, and may God be our aid.

I'll do it all just as you say.

But please, my dear, don't grudge it if I go
under the arch, through the gates;

I'll dock at the grass borders,

be sure of that. Now as for Neoboule,
someone else have her. Dear me,

she's past ripe, twice your age;

her girlhood's flower has shed its petals, lost
 all the enchantment it had.
 She never got enough;
 she's proved her . . . 's measure, crazy woman.
 Keep her away—for the crows!
 I pray no friend of mine
 would have me marry somebody like her
 and give all the neighbours a laugh.
 No, you're the one I want.
 You're not untrustworthy, you're not two-faced,
 but she's so precipitate, she
 makes friends with crowds of men.
 I don't want babies blind and premature,
 like the proverbial bitch,
 from showing too much haste.'
 That's what I said; and then I took the girl,
 and laying her down in the flowers,
 with my soft-textured cloak
 I covered her; my arm cradled her neck,
 while she in her fear like a fawn
 gave up the attempt to run.
 Gently I touched her breasts, where the young
 flesh
 peeped from the edge of her dress,
 her ripeness newly come,
 and then, caressing all her lovely form,
 I shot my hot energy off,
 just brushing golden hairs.

Fragments of other epodes

- 168 Fitzdarling, delight of the people,
 I've got a funny story
 to tell you, my dearest companion,
 and I guarantee you'll like it.
 184 She was a cheater—water in one hand,
 fire in the other.
 197 Father Zeus, I had no wedding feast . . .

- 200 He won't get off scot-free from me.
 201 The fox knows lots of tricks,
 the hedgehog only one—but it's a winner.
 192 (*On a Shipwreck*)
 From fifty men Poseidon Hippios
 chose Koiranos to spare.
 298 Among the gods Zeus is the trustiest seer,
 controlling the outcome himself.

Iambi

Erotic fragments

- 23 I replied:
 'Madam, you mustn't be at all afraid
 of ill repute. As for . . .
 I'll deal with it. Don't you be angry with me.
 You really think I'm such a wretch as that?
 You must have seen me as a low-class churl,
 not what I am and what my forebears were.
 I know the art of loving him that loves me,
 hating my hater and foulmouthing him
 with an ant's venom. So I'm quite sincere.
 This citadel that you are walking in
 was never sacked by any man, but now
 your spear has conquered it, yours is the glory:
 so be its queen, enjoy dominion.
 I dare say quite a few will envy you.'
- 48 Their nurse brought them along, with scented hair
 and bosoms, such that even an old man
 would have desired them. Oh Glaucus, . . .
- 30, 31 She had a myrtle-sprig and a beautiful rose
 that she was playing with; her hair hung down
 shading her shoulders and her upper back.
- 32 . . . right through the myrtle-spray.
- 36 They lay down in the shadow of the wall
 37 There is this wall that runs all round the yard.
 39 Every man rolled back his skin . . .

247 . . . his tender horn . . .

40 . . . wet mound of Venus . . .

41 Up and down she bounced
like a kingfisher flapping on a jutting rock.

42 Like a Thracian or Phrygian drinking beer through
a tube
she sucked, stooped down, engaged too from
behind.

43 And his dong
. . . flooded over like a Prienian
stall-fed donkey's . . .

44 . . . foam all round her mouth . . .

45 They stooped and spurted off
all their accumulated wantonness.

46 . . . through the tube into the vessel.

47 The virgin priestesses
with cudgels drove you away from the door.

60 O fortunate man, to have
such daughters to his name!

66 . . . a growth between the thighs . . .

67 I won't use surgery,
I know another sovereign remedy
for a growth of this description.

222 . . . and severed the tendons of his middle parts.

252 But the sinews of his wick
are ruptured . . .

118-20

I wish I had as sure a chance of fingering
Neoboule—
the workman falling to his flask—and pressing
tum to tummy
and thighs to thighs . . .
as sure as I know how to start the lovely round
of singing
lord Dionysus' dithyramb when the wine has
blitzed my brains in.

Political fragments

- 20 My tears are for Thasos' troubles, not Magnesia's.*
 21 . . . while Thasos stands here like
 the spine of a donkey, wreathed with unkempt forest.
 It's not a beautiful or lovely place
 22 or charming like the Siris river lands.*
 Erxias, how's that god-forsaken army
 88 regrouping this time?
- Let the stone of Tantalus
 91 not be poised above this island . . .
 . . .
- into the fray. Zeus held the balance equal,
 not turning either of the fronts . . .
 earth ran with blood . . .
- 93 . . . the son of Pisistratus
 brought back these connoisseurs of lyre and pipe
 to Thasos, with a cargo of pure gold
 for bribing Thracian dogs. But then for sake
 of private gain they did a public harm.
- 94 By their battle line
 stood Athena favouringly, daughter of
 loud-thundering Zeus.
 She it was that stirred that much-lamented
 country's army's hearts.
 Fugitives that day were seeking billets in many
 different parts;
 they retreated many furlongs . . .
 . . . but the Olympian gods' intent . . .
- 96 Glaucus, which of the gods has turned your wits?
 Have a thought for this land . . .
 braving dangers with us . . .
 . . . your spear conquered . . .
- 98 . . . spears . . . broke their spirit . . .
 . . . Athena, daughter of Zeus.
 Round the high battlements their country's doom
 they fought off . . . there was set a looming
 bastion, impressive, that we built of stone

. . . men of Lesbos . . .

. . . put shields on their arms . . .

. . . Zeus the Olympians' . . .

With our slick spears we were inflicting woe,
but round the wall they busily set ladders,
their courage high. Loud boomed the ironclad
contrivance . . . alternate; streams of missiles . . .

Quivers no longer hid their store of death

. . . arrows, while they . . .

. . . twisting the sinews, drawing bows . . .

101 For seven of the enemy we overtook and slew,
a thousand of us claim the kill . . .

228 But as for Thasos, that thrice-wretched city . . .

102 All Greece's wretchedness is now drained down
to Thasos . . .

105 Glaucus, see,* the waves are rising and the deep
 sea is disturbed;
all about the heights of Gyrae stands a towering
 mass of cloud—
that's a sign of storm. I fall a prey to unexpected
 fear.

106 . . . fast ships at sea

. . . let's untie the sheets and slacken sail.

Father Zeus, hold our wind fair and keep our
 comrades safe, for then

when we land you'll have our thanks; and keep
 the gusts and gales away,

don't hurl this new storm upon us as we fight the
 churning waves

. . . but take thought on our behalf . . .

107 Many of them, I expect, the burning Dog-star will
 parch up,
shining fiercely down . . .

108 Hear me, lord Hephaestus, to my supplication be
a favouring ally: grant the favours that are yours to
 grant.

- 110 It's true what they say: the god of war's
impartial toward men.
- 111 And encourage the younger men; but victory's
under the gods' control.
- 114 I don't like an army commander who's tall, or goes
at a trot,
or one who has glamorous wavy hair, or trims his
beard a lot.
A shortish sort of chap, who's bandy-looking
round the shins,
he's my ideal, one full of guts, and steady on his
pins.
- 115 But now Leophilus is in charge, it's Leophilus' turn
to be king;
everything's clear for Leophilus,
pray silence for Leophilus,
and all that sort of thing.

Miscellaneous iambic fragments

- 19 'Gyges* and all his gold don't interest me.
I've never been prey to envy, I don't marvel
at heavenly things, or yearn for great dominion.
That's all beyond the sights of such as me.'
-
- Thus quoth Charon the joiner
- 24 Welcome back, In a small ship you crossed
a mighty sea, and made it home from Gortyn.*
. . . . I'm glad of this as well.
It wasn't the best of vessels that you came in,
. . . . but God
held his hand over you, and now you're here
. . . . I don't mind about the cargo,
if you are safe, whether it's gone for good
or whether there's some way to get it back.
I'd never find another friend like you,
if you'd been drowned at sea, or at the hands
of spearmen lost your manhood's glorious prime.
But now it stays in bloom, God's kept you safe

. . . and see me left alone
 . . . prostrate in the gloom
 . . . I'm brought back to the light of day.

- 25 There is no single kind of human nature,
 but different things warm different people's hearts.
 For instance, Melesandros favours prick,
 Phalangios the cowherd is for . . .
 This revelation comes to you from me,
 no other prophet; Zeus the Olympians' father
 made me a . . . among men
 and a good one, whom not even Eurymas
 could fault . . .

- 26 And you too,
 O lord Apollo, strike the guilty ones
 with harm, destroy them as you do destroy,*
 but prosper us . . .

- 49 You most hateful . . .
 sneak-thief who roams about the town at night.

- 116 Let Paros go—those figs, that life at sea.

- 117 Sing, Muse, of the coiffeur Glaucus . . .

- 122 (*A father speaks*)

There's nothing now you can't expect, nothing's
 against the odds,
 there are no miracles, now Zeus the father of the
 gods
 has turned the noonday into night and hidden the
 bright sun
 out of the sky, so clammy dread came over
 everyone.
 From now on all is credible, and like enough to be:
 let none of you now be surprised at anything you
 see,
 not even if land animals switch to where dolphins
 roam,
 and the salt sea and the crashing waves become
 their chosen home,
 while dolphins take a fancy to the mountains and
 the trees.

Indeed, already we observe that Archeanactides,
the . . . the son of . . .
has entered wedlock . . .
. . . but my daughter . . .

124 (*To Pericles*)

. . . like Mykonos people . . .
you drank my wine in quantity and strength
and brought no contribution . . .
and you didn't wait to be invited, like
a friend; your belly led your wits astray
to shamelessness . . .

125 I crave a fight with you, it's like a thirst.

126 But I do have one good skill,
that's to repay whoever hurts me with a
corresponding ill.

223 It's a cicada you've got by the wing.

127 So I did wrong. I daresay others have been caught
the same.

128 Heart, my heart, with helpless, sightless troubles
now confounded,
up, withstand the enemy, opposing breast to
breast.

All around they lie in wait, but stand you firmly
grounded,
not over-proud in victory, nor in defeat oppressed.
In your rejoicing let your joy, in hardship your
despairs
be tempered: understand the pattern shaping
men's affairs.

129 For now, my heart, your friends let you go hang.

130 It all depends upon the gods. Often enough, when
men
are prostrate on the ground with woe, they set
them up again;
and often enough, when men are standing proud
and all seems bright,
they tip them over on their backs, and then they're
in a plight—

a man goes wandering, short of bread, out of his
mind with fright.

131-2 Mortals have moods that vary, Glaucus, son of
Leptines,
according to the kind of day that father Zeus
decrees;
their attitudes are governed by whatever each one
sees.

133 No one here enjoys respect or reputation once he's
dead:
in this city we the living tend to cultivate instead
the living's favour. Once you die, you get the
worst of everything.

134 After all, it isn't good to mock the dead . . .
205 Otherwise
you'd not be using scent, a crone like you.

206 . . . fat round the ankles, a disgusting creature.

213 . . . with their lives in the arms of the waves.

215 (*On the loss at sea of the poet's sister's husband*)

I feel no interest
in iambi or amusements.

216 Now I'll be called an auxiliary, like a Carian.

217 . . . with hair cut off the shoulders, basin-fashion.

220 In that event
I'd want the earth to open and swallow me.

233 In that situation
your legs are your best possession.

259 Not even Heracles beat two at once.

297 He was skulking at home, the revolting prat.

302 We often see
how wealth that was built up by much hard work
all drains away into a harlot's gut.

Adesp. 35
. . . avenging spirits . . .
Be sure of this: the gods take awful toll
of impious men who wrong their dearest ones,

together; it will be an agony
of swords—that is the warfare that the doughty
barons of Euboea are expert at . . .

4 But come now, take the cup and pass along
the clipper's benches, open up the casks
and draw the red wine off the lees—we too
shall need some drink to get us through this
watch.

5 Some Saian* sports my splendid shield:
I had to leave it in a wood,
but saved my skin. Well, I don't care—
I'll get another just as good.

6 . . . giving the enemy
a nasty leaving-present . . .

14 Aisimides, if you mind what other folk
will say, you'll never have a lovely time.

15 Glaucus, an auxiliary's a buddy
for just so long as he's prepared to fight.

16 It's Luck and Destiny, Pericles, that bring
whatever a man gets . . .

17 Everything comes to men from work
and human effort . . .

9 (*On the loss at sea of the poet's sister's husband*)

It would have been less hard, if we had had
his head, his fair limbs to wrap up in white
for the holy fire to operate upon.

11 Well, wine will help . . .
For tears won't heal my wound; if I attend
feasts and diversions, they won't make it worse.

Further fragments on shipwrecks

8 And often in the reaches of the white-hair-tossing
sea
they prayed for sweet safe homecoming . . .

12 . . . put lord Poseidon's painful offerings away . . .

13 Not a man in the town will find fault, Pericles,
with our mourning, and enjoy his festival,
nor in the canton: such fine men the surge
of the tempestuous sea has overwhelmed,
and swollen are our lungs with piercing pain.

But then, my friend, the gods for ills past
healing

have set endurance as the antidote.

This woe is different men's at different times:
now it has come our way, and we bemoan
our bleeding wound; another day 'twill pass
to others. Come then, everyone endure,
spend no more time in womanish lament.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Archilochus

Epodes: the ancients gave this name to those poems of Archilochus that were in simple strophic form, with one or two short lines following a longer one. In some cases we can group enough fragments together from the same poem to get an idea of its overall plan.

20 *Magnesia's*: Magnesia on the Maeander was a Greek town in Asia Minor. Its sack by the Cimmerians (see the note on Callinus 5a) sent a shock-wave through Greece.

22 *the Siris river lands*: a site in south Italy that attracted colonists from Ionia.

105 *Glaucus, see*: the impending storm is metaphorical. According to the author who quotes the fragment, it stands for battle with Thracians. The heights of Gyrae were some 25 miles north of Paros. Fragment 106 may belong to the same poem.

19 *Gyges*: king of Lydia, the most powerful state in western Asia Minor. He reigned from about 687 to 652.

24 *Gortyn*: one of the principal towns of Crete at this period.

26 *destroy them as you do destroy*: the verb is *apollyō*, which Apollo's name naturally suggested to a Greek ear.

2 *Ismaros*: in Thrace, the source of a celebrated wine.

5 *Saian*: a Thracian tribe.

Semonides

6 *A wife?*: these two lines are a close paraphrase of Hesiod, *Works and Days* 702–3.

20 *Maia's son*: Hermes, a god of herdsmen.

Callinus

5a *Cimmerian horde*: the Cimmerians were a people from north of the Black Sea. In the late eighth century BC, displaced by Scythian invaders, a large number of them crossed the Caucasus, and over the next half-century they butted their way across Asia Minor, eventually reaching the Aegean.

Eumelus

696 From a processional composed for a Messenian men's chorus to sing at a festival on Delos. Ithome was a mountain in Messene; the god worshipped there was Zeus.